

News Release

Controller of the State of California - Kathleen Connell

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

"COLD-HEARTED" GOVERNOR VETOES CONNELL'S BREAST CANCER BILL

Veto Occurs During National Breast Cancer Awareness Month

SACRAMENTO, October 10, 1997 -- "Does it mean nothing to this governor that women's lives are on the line?" said State Controller Kathleen Connell in response to Governor Wilson's veto today of AB 760, a bill that would extend a lifesaving treatment to women suffering from breast cancer. "Clearly the governor doesn't care that 5,000 California women will die of breast cancer this year and that this bill would have saved some of those lives. His political decision to rob them of this treatment combined with his failure to recognize breast cancer as a leading killer of women is nothing short of cold-hearted."

Sponsored by Connell and authored by Carole Migden (D-San Francisco), AB 760 would have entitled a woman with breast cancer to a prompt, independent review following the denial of a physician-recommended treatment by her insurance company or HMO. If the independent review panel determines that the patient should receive the treatment, then the HMO or health insurer must cover it. Currently, many women must file lawsuits to gain access to Autologous Bone Marrow Transplantation (ABMT) therapy after a denial.

AB 760 passed both the Assembly and Senate overwhelmingly and received enormous support from editorial boards across the state -- only to be killed by the Governor who kept his vow to veto all HMO-related legislative bills. Official AB 760 supporters included: the American Cancer Society, California Nurses Association, Save Ourselves of Sacramento, Women of Color Breast Cancer Support Project, National Association of Women Business Owners *and* Governor Wilson's own California Commission on the Status of Women.

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AB 760 Veto/2-2-2

"I share my extreme disappointment with the thousands of women and families who, like me, are deeply pained by the insensitivity shown by this governor and his politics," Connell continued. "Women suffering from breast cancer and their families surely deserved better. This veto is unconscionable, heartless and unforgivable." In a cruel and ironic twist, the governor vetoed AB 760 during National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Last year the Controller led the effort to expand ABMT coverage to the more than 400,000 women insured by the California Public Employees Retirement System (CalPERS), which utilizes 22 health plans in its government-sponsored health care program.

"People can't postpone the immediacy of their medical crises," said Connell in reference to Wilson's decision to veto all managed-care reform bills until reviewed by his task force next year. "While the governor stands behind his political line in the sand, women will continue to lose their lives to this deadly killer."

ABMT is used only in severe situations. The patient's bone marrow is removed and then she is exposed to extremely high doses of radiation. After the treatment, which would have killed the bone marrow if left in the body, the marrow is re-introduced back into the patient. Currently, even with their doctor's recommendation, many women are denied coverage (primarily due to its high cost), which results in litigation.

Breast cancer is the most commonly occurring cancer in women. It's the second most common cancer killer among women, and the leading cause of death among women 40-55. It is estimated that nearly 20,000 California women will be diagnosed with breast cancer for the first time in 1997. During the same period, approximately 5,000 California women will die of the cancer.

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